

## John 13:31-35

MW Lent 2, March 9, 2022

Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

*When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. <sup>32</sup> If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. <sup>33</sup> Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' <sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Do people know that you're a Christian? Not the people that you talk to and that you've invited to church and spoken about Jesus with. But the other people in your life, the people that you know, but you don't know each other very well. The ones that you've never spoken at length with—do those people know that you're a Christian? They ought to be able to, even if they haven't heard you talk about being a Christian. As Jesus alludes to at the end of our text, people should be able to tell that we are Christians because of how we treat one another. I wonder if we live up to that lofty goal.

I have a portion of a letter to read to you. It's a very old letter, and it's worth our attention because it deals with just this very thing: *"Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and they don't hesitate to honor widows; and they rescue the orphans who are being abused. The one who has gives to the one who lacks, without bragging about it. And when they meet a stranger, they take him into their homes and rejoice over him as if he were a brother. . . . And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food themselves, they will fast two or three days just so they can have something to share with the one lacking food. They observe the teachings of their Messiah with much care, living justly and soberly as the Lord their God has commanded them."*

That letter is dated from around a.d. 133—a hundred years after Jesus died and rose. The letter was written to the Roman emperor Hadrian by a pagan philosopher who was trying to explain what Christianity was all about. Isn't it wonderful? What a powerful testimony those early Christians gave about the hope that was inside them! This was the thing above all other things (except, maybe, their willingness to die) that the unbelieving Greeks and Romans noticed about the Christians: "See how they love one another!"

Tonight, as we continue our series *Three Words of Truth*, we encounter such a simple, short phrase that summarizes what our entire life in Christ *ought* to be all about: **Love One Another**. The words come from the lips of our dear Savior Jesus, the God of love, who:

- 1. came here to show us love.**
- 2. leaves us here to live in love.**

Whenever we read from the gospels and hear Jesus speak, we should keep asking ourselves this question: What was the Son of God doing on earth? The Bible says that God lives in the bliss and glory of heaven, in unapproachable light; there is no sadness, there is no pain, there are no problems, there are no heartaches or heartbreaks. So why would he leave that and come here, where all the opposite is true? Of course, we know the answer to that question, but let's set the reason for His incarnation aside for just a second and marvel at all of it.

We hear the gospel lessons so often—a blessing! But in hearing them so much and reading all about what Jesus was doing here, the fact that GOD CAME DOWN TO EARTH—we might sometimes take that for granted. Consider who God is. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the eternal great I AM. He is completely independent; he needs nothing for his happiness. He was from

eternity, and that was just fine! He did not need to create the world to have some sense of fulfillment or purpose. Bottom line: He simply doesn't *need* us, much less does He *need* to become one of us and to live among us for a time. He doesn't *need* to do these things, yet this is exactly what He does.

This Word of God confronts us with a kind of love we can barely begin to grasp. In the Nicene Creed, we confess, *"For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven . . ."* Think about those words! They follow earlier words: *"We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things that are visible and invisible."* Knowing all things as God does, this Creator God went ahead and created the world and its people, knowing full-well that Adam and Eve would defy Him and plunge the world into sin and death. And He knew even before creation, that He Himself as God would have to step into our shoes if we were to be rescued from death and hell. It all happened, just as He knew it would: Adam and Eve ate the fruit, the plunged creation into death, and without wasting a single moment, God then walked into the garden and announced His rescue plan.

He would send His own Son to teach and to heal and to comfort and to be despised and rejected by those He'd come to save. And He did all that; and Jesus didn't hesitate to follow through on these plans. He knew He had come to be the ***"man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."*** (Isaiah 53:3) He knew His ultimate role in this world was to be ***"like a lamb that is led to the slaughter."*** (Isaiah 53:7) He knew that as He carried the sins of the world on His shoulders, as painful as everything that evening was, the worst thing would be that His Father would need to turn His back on Him, for He would become the living, breathing curse of sin.

You and me—we were lost. We were dead in trespasses and sins. We were born an object of God's wrath, not his pride and joy. Yet in his great mercy—mercy, because he was under no obligation to do so—he came and delivered us from all of it. ***"This is love,"*** John writes in another place, ***"not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins"*** (1 Jn 4:10). This is astonishing behavior. Think of how surprising the love of the early Christians was to the Romans. Now consider the surprising love that God showed to His enemies, you and me.

We might show love to many people in our lives, many of them who also love us back. We might even show love to people that don't love us back or who can't reciprocate that love, like acquaintances or babies or just random people asking for our help. And that's good, but think of where we draw the line when it comes to love. We can handle if we show love to someone and they don't reciprocate it; it might be a bit annoying, but we can handle it. But what if someone not only didn't reciprocate that love, but actually responded with the opposite of love? Imagine giving money to a beggar at a traffic light, and they then start insulting you to your face. Imagine helping a friend with a chore or with some work, and then you find out that they left and went and slandered you to someone else?

Would we still love them? Or would we regret what we'd done for them? Would we be less likely to help them or others like them the next time? I think we all know the answer. And yet, for Jesus, there was no line. There was no limit to His love. As Paul so perfectly sums up Christ's love in his letter to the Romans: ***"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** (Romans 5:6) That is to say, while we were disobeying His will, while we were living completely contrary to how He'd created us to live, while we were slapping Him in the face—Christ died for us.

And thank God He did! For now, in that same love, He looks at each of us and says, ***"Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven."*** (Matthew 9:2) The Son of God has paid for your failures with His own blood, and God has forgotten them all. Your sins are now irrelevant when it comes to where you go from here.

And where do we go from here? Forward—daily—each day renewed by God’s forgiving grace, inching closer—daily—to following him to heaven. Each day, striving to follow His command, **“Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”** **“Just as I loved you,”** Jesus says. Boy, now there is an impossible standard. Just as He loved us? That means, no drawing a line in the sand for the limits of our love? That means loving not only those who can’t reciprocate our love, but also those who despise us even after we’ve shown them love? How can we love anyone the way JESUS loved US?

**“A new command,”** Jesus calls it. But was it really? This has always been God’s will. This was the same commandment God had given us through Moses, “Love one another”—which is really what the Ten Commandments are all about. Love God with all your heart soul and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. (cf. Mark 12:30-31) But we don’t do those things! I don’t really love God with ALL of my heart, soul and mind; no, there are many times when I love many other things more than I love God. And perhaps there are some people whom I love *almost* as much as I love myself, but that would be only a few, and far from what God expects of me.

The new part of this commandment is when He says, **“Love one another, as I loved you.”** He keeps His love in view for us so that we constantly remember it. So that even when we fail to live up to His standards, we still remember that He loves us. Like Judas, we constantly are on the lookout for ourselves. Like Judas, we often love ourselves first and others only as it fits around our love for ourselves. Like Judas, we put conditions on our love, and we choose when to withdraw our love. *Unlike* Judas, let’s turn to our loving Savior, and confess, **“God, forgive me, for I have done wrong.”**

And He does. That’s the marvel of God’s love. It is so. . . steady. Every single day as we confess our sins and humbly hang our heads in defeat because of our sin, He is right there to assure us that we are His dear, forgiven children. Every day, He does not give us what we deserve but heaps upon us everything that we don’t deserve. Every day, He turns our rebellious unfaithfulness with His faithful love.

This everyday, steady, unconditional love ought to leave us asking in the words of the Psalm: **“How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me?”** (Psalm 116:12) There’s no way we could ever repay it, and it’s not required that we do. But Jesus does leave us with three simple words of truth by which we can proclaim the love our Savior has shown to each of us. Here it is: Love one another. May God grant that this type of love comes from us, even as He has granted it to us, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.